

TOM DAVIS, VIRGINIA,
CHAIRMAN

CHRISTOPHER SHAYS, CONNECTICUT
DAN BURTON, INDIANA
ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, FLORIDA
JOHN M. McHUGH, NEW YORK
JOHN L. MICA, FLORIDA
GIL GUTKNECHT, MINNESOTA
MARK E. SOUDER, INDIANA
STEVEN C. LATOURETTE, OHIO
TODD RUSSELL, PLATTS, PENNSYLVANIA
CHRIS CANNON, UTAH
JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR., TENNESSEE
CANDICE MILLER, MICHIGAN
MICHAEL R. TURNER, OHIO
DARRELL ISSA, CALIFORNIA
VIRGINIA BROWN-WAITE, FLORIDA
JON C. PORTER, NEVADA
KENNY MARCHANT, TEXAS
LYNN A. WESTMORELAND, GEORGIA
PATRICK T. McHENRY, NORTH CAROLINA
CHARLES W. DENT, PENNSYLVANIA
VIRGINIA FOXX, NORTH CAROLINA

ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5674
FACSIMILE (202) 225-3974
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
TTY (202) 225-6852

<http://reform.house.gov>

HENRY A. WAXMAN, CALIFORNIA,
RANKING MINORITY MEMBER

TOM LANTOS, CALIFORNIA
MAJOR R. OWENS, NEW YORK
EDOLPHUS TOWNS, NEW YORK
PAUL E. KANJORSKI, PENNSYLVANIA
CAROLYN B. MALONEY, NEW YORK
ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS, MARYLAND
DENNIS J. KUCINICH, OHIO
DANNY K. DAVIS, ILLINOIS
WM. LACY CLAY, MISSOURI
DIANE E. WATSON, CALIFORNIA
STEPHEN P. LYNCH, MASSACHUSETTS
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, MARYLAND
LINDA T. SANCHEZ, CALIFORNIA
C.A. DUTCH RUPPERSBERGER,
MARYLAND
BRIAN HIGGINS, NEW YORK
ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

BERNARD SANDERS, VERMONT,
INDEPENDENT

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS, AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Christopher Shays, Connecticut
Chairman

Room B-372 Rayburn Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
Tel: 202 225-2548
Fax: 202 225-2382

Statement of Rep. Christopher Shays December 13, 2005

Just two days ago, Coast Guard officials began conducting search operations in the waters north of the Bahamas because a cruise ship passenger was reported missing. In early November, modern day brigands fired mortars at a cruise ship off the coast of Somalia. These are two recent additions to a growing manifest of unexplained disappearances, unsolved crimes and brazen acts of lawlessness on the high seas. According to industry experts, a wide range of criminal activities, including drug smuggling, sexual assaults, piracy and terrorism, threaten the security of maritime travel and trade. Today we begin an examination of the complex web of laws, treaties, regulations and commercial practices meant to protect lives and property in an increasingly dangerous world.

Ocean travel puts passengers and crew in a distant, isolated environment and subjects them to unique risks and vulnerabilities. Like small cities, cruise ships experience crimes – from petty to profoundly tragic. But city dwellers know the risks of urban life, and no one falls off a city never to be heard from again. Cruise passengers can be blinded to the very real perils of the sea by ship operators unwilling to interrupt the party for security warnings. And after an incident occurs, a thorough investigation can be difficult when the crime scene literally floats away, on schedule, to its next port of call.

Jurisdictional and bureaucratic tangles can also impede investigation and resolution of crimes at sea. For purely economic reasons, most commercial ships fly under foreign flags. Passengers cannot assume the protection of U.S. laws and law enforcement will be available in time, if at all. When events involve citizens of different nations, in the territorial waters of a third, all three can assert some jurisdictional claim. While these legal and diplomatic niceties are being resolved, the crime trail grows cold and crucial evidence may go overboard or melt into the crowd ashore.

The recently promulgated National Strategy for Maritime Security and the Global Maritime Response Plan should better integrate and accelerate federal agency assistance to those attacked at sea. We will monitor implementation of those new policies closely.

Lack of hard data on maritime crime rates and trends engenders a false sense of security and frustrates efforts to address emerging problems. Some companies report incidents voluntarily to the Federal Bureau of Investigation or international organizations. But others do not, and no truly industry-wide data is available to help discerning customers assess the real risks of transoceanic travel.

So we asked those most involved in responding to maritime crises to describe current legal and operational security standards. What statistics are kept and who keeps them? What information is given to passengers on the risks of international travel by sea? How are missing person reports investigated? How and when is it determined if a crime is involved? How are jurisdictional conflicts resolved? Are there best-practices and technologies that should be used to protect passengers in the alluring but unforgiving marine environment?

Last July, George Smith and his new wife Jennifer thought they were launching their lives together on a honeymoon cruise. But after only ten days aboard he disappeared under circumstances still being investigated by the FBI and Turkish officials. His family, and many others who have contacted us, seek closure, await justice and ask that no more families endure avoidable tragedies.

We hear their call for safer seas, are determined to pursue this investigation and we look for greater candor, accountability and responsiveness from those entrusted to carry precious cargo into a vast, inherently hazardous realm.